AGRARIAN MOVEMENT IN RAJASTHAN

(A Description of Some Unknown Source Material)

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The agrarian movement in Rajasthan has not been paid adequate attention by the scholars. The source materials for the topic is so vast that it cannot be covered within the narrow limits of the paper like this. However, I have tried to give a complete information in brief.

The nature of land-holdings in Rajasthan was unique and distinct in many ways from the nature of land-holdings in other parts of the country. The holdings belonged to the local kings, the jagirdars, zamindars and the kisans (peasants), respectively. The peasants were not the owners of the land but were only the tenants. They were subjected to heavy taxation, which were devised in many ways. On the whole a peasant was subjected to 86 different kinds of taxes.

The agrarian movement in Rajasthan may be dated from Bijolia[1] unrest. The peasants of the place had been agitating since 1913 against the inequitable taxes, forced labour, acts of injustice and imposition of heavy land revenue. The agitation was led by a Sadhu, Baba Sitaram Das till Bijai Singh Pathik, who settled down in Bijolia, assumed the

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1. Bijolia, a place now in Bhilwara district was a premier jagir of former State of Udaipur. This is situated about 30 miles South-West of Bundi in the Aravali Ranges.

command of the agitation. The Memoirs of Baba Sitaram Das[2] are very good source about the peasants conditions. The serious and pitiful conditions of the Kisans compelled the Sadhu to defy the State and Thikana authorities. The year 1916 was a very bad year for Bijolia, for, monsoon had practically failed and so also the crops. Even then the Thikana authorities with the help of the State Police tried to collect the revenue alongwith the war fund.[3] Peasants under the leadership of Bijai Singh Pathik rose in rebellion. The matter was referred to the Resident, who ordered the Munsif to arrest Pathik and sent him to Udaipur. But the Munsif who was in collusion with Pathik allowed him to escape. Now leadership was assumed by Shri Manik Lal Verma alongwith others, while Pathik conducted the movement from the eastern boundary of Mewar.[4] Thikana authorities tried to supress the movement by oppressive methods. Mr. Trench, the Settlement Officer, even ordered firing in villages of Raita and Tilasman where many people fell victims to the bullets, but this strengthened the movement. This has been well depicted in the Memoirs of Late Shri Manik Lal Verma.[5]

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2. Baba Sitaram Das Ke Samsamaran MS. are available at State Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner and also at the office of Shodhak, a research digest, Jaipur.

3. Abhudaya 8-4-1916 talks of general drought in Rajasthan.

4. Hindustan Times 25-5-1927.

5. Manik Lal Verma Ke Samsamaran available at Rajasthan Archives, Bikaner and with Mrs. Narayani Devi M.P. widow of late Shri Manik Lal Verma at 219 North Avenue, New Delhi.

Bajai Singh Pathik along with others attended the Congress Session of 1918, where he became very intimate with late Shri Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, the Editor of the Pratap who strongly supported the cause of Bijolia, by writing an article on it. Bijai Singh Pathik also wrote some articles in the Pratap regarding Bijolia Movement. B.G.Tilak was also impressed by Bijai Singh Pathik, and, Tilak's Paper, the Maratha[7] made Bijolia movement very popular in the country. Information about this movement is also available in other contemporary news-papers.[8] Few geets were composed to encourage the peasants. Manik Lal Verma's Panchira[9], Bijai Singh Pathik's lok geets[10], Bhanwar Lal Swarnkar's[11] songs and Prem Chand's[12] geets are important, as these represent the sufferings of the kisans.

The Kisans appointed their own Panchayats to look after the matters of daily administration including crop affairs. Thus Thikana administration was paralysed. Ultimately the

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6. Pratap (Kanpur) issues for 1913 to 1940-41 available at Saraswati Library Fatehpur Shekhawati a place about 90 miles towards west of Jaipur City.

7. Maratha (Marathi) available at Fatehpur.

8. Arjun, Navyug Sandesh, Tyag Bhumi Vishal Bharat, Young Rajasthan, Princely India available at Fatehpur and Bombay Chronicle, 9-2-1921

9. Manik Lal Verma's Panchira available at the office of the Shodhak, Jaipur.

10. Bijai Singh Pathik's geets, compilation is available with Smt. Janki Devi Pathik widow of Shri Pathik, teacher in a Local Girls School at Mathura.

11. Bhanwarlal Swarnkar's songs are available at the office of the Shodhak, Jaipur.

12. Prem Chand's geets were more popular, people still remember

authorities yielded and a settlement took place in 1922. Accordingly, "Small lags (Customary dues) shall not be paid and begar (unpaid forced labour) shall not be extorted, except in the case of the State Chief ~~xfxkkxxxkkxkx~~ to which the people agreed". The first battle was won. The settlement and references are well depicted in Government records like, Foreign Political Proceedings, Fortnightly Reports, Settlement Reports etc., Government records available at National Archives of India, New Delhi and Bijolia Sambandhi Kagiats available at the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

Bijolia movement pioneered new movement. The agitation of the peasants even after 1922 was continued in Mewar, Bundi and Sirohi. Amet[13] and Sirohi Bhils revolted against the disparity of the taxes under Motilal Tejawat, who was finally put behind the bars and was released in 1936. Motilal Tejawat's Atam Katha[14] is the main and important source material for the incident. This reveals that a Kisan Sammelan was organised at Barisal[15] under the Chairmanship of Motilal Tejawat. This Sammelan prepared a big memorandum named Mewar Pukar and presented it to the Raja, but all in vain. Abhudaya[16] a contemporary weekly newspaper published from Prayag is also a very good source regarding the Bhil movement of Amet and Sirohi. Government records are Fortnightly Reports, Foreign Political Proceedings, Home Political Proceedings, available at the National Archives of India and Bijolia Sambardhi Kagjat at the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

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13. A place in Udaipur.
14. Motilal Tejawat wrote his Memoirs in his Atam Katha, Ms. available at Hindi Sahitya Mandir, Jodhpur.
15. A place in Udaipur.
16. Abhudaya, 15.4.1922, 22.4.1922, 3.6.1922 issues are important and are available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi. Abhudaya's issues of 15.7.1922 and 22.7.1922 have also published the answer of Sirohi ruler clarifying about Bhil subjection in Sirohi.

In Bundi it took a different turn. Meetings were held to protest against several inequitable taxes, specially the war fund which was collected an anna per rupee on revenue. The kisan movement was organised under the leadership of Shri Mendu Ram Sharma. Abhudaya[17] is only source which gives the fullest information on the incident besides Government records. Some sketchy inferences are in Motilal Tejawat's Atam Katha.[18]

Parsoli,[19] Mandesra[20] and Begu[21] in Mewar (Udaipur) faced a serious oppression at the hands of the British, where many villages were set on fire. Even women and children were not spared by French in Govindpura (Begu), where a meeting of Kisan Sabha was fixed. Sources on the Begu affairs are Memoirs of the leaders like Haribhai Kinkar,[22] Ram Narayan Choudhary[23]; Durga Prasad Choudhary,[24] Arjun Lal Sethi,[25] and Rupaji Kirpaji Dhakar,[26] Later's Memoirs are most important as he was directly involved in the affair. Besides this, contemporary newspapers like Bombay Chronicle[27], Daily Express[28] and Pioneer[29] also supply good information and represent public opinion.

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17. Abhudaya's issue of 10.6.1922 is most important and available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi.
18. Atamkatha of Motilal Tejawat Op.Cit.
19. Parsoli is a place in Chittor District.
20. Mandesra is now in Chittor District.
21. Begu was also a premier Jagir of Udaipur now a place in Chittor District.
22. Memoirs of Haribhai Kinkar available at Shodhak's Office, Jaipur.
23. Memoirs of Ram Narayan Choudhary are available with him at Palbichla Ajmer.
24. Memoirs of Durga Prasad Choudhary are published in Navjyoti 15 August, 1973.
25. Arjun Lal Sethi's Memoirs are available with Sethi's family at Jaipur.
26. Memoirs of Rupaji Kripaji Dhakar are available at Shodhak's office, Jaipur.
27. Bombay Chronicle, 9.2.27.
28. Daily Express 16.2.1922. Cuttings are available at B.Vidyamandir Shodh Pritisthan Bikaner.

The British Government of India for economic exploitation arranged costly imports. This necessitated increase in the land revenue and other taxes, which was done under cover of new revenue settlements in almost every State. The result of these enhanced taxes was that the troubles broke out again in 1925 in different States. The most tragic was the agitation in Neemuchana,[30] a Thikana in the former State of Alwar. Quite a few small jagirdars felt hard hit by the enhanced rates of revenue collection but it was the Thakur of Neemuchana who openly defied the decision of the Government. As a result of which army was called in and consequence of its firing 150 lives were lost and the entire village was destroyed. Information about this is supplied by two contemporary news papers, Princely India[31] and Tarun Rajasthan.[32] Another centre of trouble in the same year was the Jaipur State, where in Khetri and Sikar, the peasants, who were mostly Jats, rose in rebellion. The movement was conducted by Ram Narain Choudhary in the rural areas while Baba Narsingh Dass led the movement in Jaipur City. Full information regarding this movement may be obtained from the Private Papers of Shri Ram Narain Choudhary[33] and the Memoirs left by late Baba Narsingh Das.[34]

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30. Neemuchana a town in Alwar District.
31. Princely India - 16.8.32 (sic) available at Saraswati Library, Fatehpur.
32. Tarun Rajasthan available at Fatehpur.
33. Private Papers of Shri Ram Narain Choudhary are available at Palbichla Ajmer.
34. Memoirs of Narsingh Das were named by him as Rajasthan Ki Pukar (Rajasthan Archives, Bikaner).

In 1927 Bijolia re-appeared on the scene, when the Jagirdar of the place increased taxes ignoring agreement of 1922.[35] Bijai Singh Pathik who formed Rajasthan Seva Sangh and was its Chairman, was not in a position to render any direct help to the kisans as he was under prohibitory orders to enter Mewar. Thus Haribhau Upadhyaya was sent. Shri Haribhau Upadhyaya had an interview with the Maharana and effected a settlement. Accordingly kisans agreed to pay arrears while the State agreed to abolish all the extra taxes and to restore land to its original owners. Besides Government records, the memoirs of late Shri Haribhar Upadhyaya[36] constitute the source material for the second phase of Bijolia Movement.

In 1932 Kisan movement in Shekhawati was organised under Jat Kisan Sabha. In 1934 about 2000 peasants marched to Jaipur to interview the Maharaja and to put their demands and grievances[37] before him. By 1936 Jat Kisan Sabha of Sikar

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35. Bombay Chronicle 27.5.1927.

36. Memoirs of Late Shri Haribhau Upadhaya are available at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi under the Head Private Papers of Shri Haribhau Upadhyaya. In Haribhau Upadhyaya's Tyagbhumi, a newspaper published from Ajmer (in the issue of Asad Charkaram, Vikram Samvat 1986 (1929) all the details regarding the second phase of Bijolia Movement has been described. Shri Upadhyaya states that when he heard the miserable condition of about peasants in Bijolia he could not control himself, and broke down in tears.

37. The National Call 25.5.1934.

and Jhunjhunu[38] was re-organised by Pt. Tarkeshwar Sharma and was named as Kisan Sabha only. Pt. Tarkeshwar Sharma a native of Singhana[39] started a hand written newspaper titled Gram Samachar[40] through which he encouraged the agitation. However, by 1939 the agitation was crushed and leaders like Pt. Tarkeshwar Sharma, Hiralal Shastri, Deshraj[41], Baba Narsingh Dass etc., were either imprisoned or exiled from the State. Deshraj and Tarkeshwar Sharma reached Agra and from there they published a newspaper Ganesh[42] through which they continued the agitation. Most reliable source for this is the Memoirs of Shri Hira Lal Shastri[43] as he was one of the leading personalities of the former State of Jaipur and directly participated in the movement.

In 1945-46 Rajasthan witnessed another agrarian crisis at Dudhwa Khara and Rajgarh[44] in Bikaner State. Peasants rose in rebellion under the leadership of Pt. Magharam. Other leaders were Prof. Kedar Nath[45], Raghuwar Dayal Goel[46] and Kumbha Ram Arya[47],

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38. Sikar and Jhunjhunu, now are two separate districts in the modern Rajasthan. This region is known as Shekawati.
39. Singhana, a town in Jhunjhunu district about 20 miles South West from Jhunjhunu.
40. Gram Samachar's file for 1936-37 is available at Shodhak's office, Jaipur.
41. Deshraj was a Jat and belonged to the Jat State of Bharatpur, later on he wrote Jat Itihas.
42. Ganesh Available at Saraswati Library, Fatehpur.
43. Memoirs of Shri Hira Lal Shastri are preserved in the private paper collection section of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
44. Dhudwa Khara and Rajgarh are about 18 and 50 miles from Churu respectively.
45. Prof. Kedar Nath is an M.L.A., Rajasthan and resides at Jaipur.
46. Raghuwar Dayal Goel is an advocate and also has few papers like pamphlets, Court Arrest, Warrants etc.
47. Kumbha Ram Arya an M.P.(Rajya Sabha) narrated the story to the writer. Other important leaders were Sardar Har Lal Singh, Ladhu Ram Joshi and Ghasi Ram Choudhary.

though the Kisans were agitating since 1932 under the leadership of Chaudhary Hanuman Singh of Dudhwakhara.[48] The movement is well depicted in Bikaner ka Rajnaitik Jagran aur Pandit Magharam.[49] This is a compilation of facts, reports, proceedings of Praja Mandal etc. The newspaper Veer Arjun[50] is also a good source, where the Dudhwakhara's Kisans' view point, their difficulties and genuine demands are given in elaborate details.

All the troubles of agrarian nature of these States during preindependence times were not solved till the abolition of Zamindari and Jagirdari in Rajasthan in 1950.

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48. Lok Yuddha. files of 1946.

49. Bikaner ka Rajnitik Jagran Aur Pandit Magharam a copy was made available to me by Shri Satya Narain Pareek, Director Bhartiya Vidhya Mandir Shodh Pratishthan, Bikaner. Shodhak also possess a copy of it. Pt. Magharam's son Sri Ram Narain Sharma is a Municipal Counciller in Bikaner. He also possesses Private Papers of Pt. Magharam, files of Lokyudha Newspaper, Prajamandal records, pamphlets and some cuttings of Veer Arjun Paper.

50. Veer Arjun 22.12.1945.